

REPORT TO:	Democratic Services Committee
REPORT NO:	HCCS/19/19
DATE:	14 March 2019
REPORT FROM:	Sioned Wyn Davies Head of Corporate and Customer Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Linda Roberts (Tel: 292221)
SUBJECT:	Webcasting of Council Meetings
WARD:	N/A

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To consider whether the webcasting of council meetings should continue after the current contract extension has expired in January 2020 and if so to consider the basis on which webcasting services should be procured.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 At its meeting in December 2014 the Council approved funding from existing cash limited budgets to enable a re-procurement of webcasting services. The outcome of the procurement exercise was that the webcasting of Council meetings be provided by Public-i.
- 2.1 The current webcasting contract with Public-i was awarded for three years with the option to extend for a further one year. In September 2018 Council agreed to the contract renewal to include webcasting of all Scrutiny Committee meetings from the Council Chamber subject to availability and any other practical issues. The contract ends in January 2020 and Members need to decide whether they wish to continue broadcasting meetings beyond that date and on what basis.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **To consider whether to continue webcasting council meetings and recommend accordingly to Council (if required) to enable a procurement exercise to be undertaken during 2019 and to determine any funding requirements.**

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- i. To monitor the webcasting of Council meetings.
- ii. To enable a proper procurement exercise to be undertaken in a timely manner.

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 4.1 Webcasting of meetings is not currently a legislative requirement but is strongly supported by Welsh Government and is linked to the provisions within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to strengthen local democracy in ensuring that local authorities reach out to and engage with all sectors of the community they serve. The draft Local Government (Wales) Bill, published for consultation in November 2015, includes provisions requiring County Councils to put in place arrangements to broadcast electronically the proceedings of a meeting, or any part of a meeting, of a county council, Executive or of a committee or sub-committee of a county council which is open to the public, so that members of the public not in attendance at the meeting can see and hear the proceedings as they take place.
- 4.2 The above provisions were retained in the 2017 White Paper Consultation – Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed. Initially it was anticipated that a Local Government (Wales) Bill would be published in late 2018 or early 2019 but this has not taken place. The Welsh Government has set up a Working Group on Local Government and at present there has been no further progress on whether webcasting will be made compulsory for local authorities in Wales.
- 4.3 At its meeting on 8 March 2018 this Committee were asked to consider whether council meetings should continue to be webcast after the current contract with Public-i expired in January 2019 and if so on what basis webcasting services should be procured. The Committee agreed that consideration should be given to webcasting all Council meetings and that a report on the practicalities and implications of doing so be brought back to the next meeting. In July 2018 this Committee decided to set up a Task and Finish Group to consider webcasting issues in more detail.
- 4.4 In September 2018 this Committee recommended that the leasing of a webcasting system for Meeting Room 1 be approved with a view to webcasting Scrutiny Committees where possible from that room, subject to available budget. Due to budget pressures, at its meeting on 26 September Council decided to extend the current Public-i contract until January 2020, with the addition of webcasting all Scrutiny Committees from the Council Chamber subject to the availability of the Chamber and any other practical issues during the remainder of the current municipal year. The annual calendar of meetings for 2019/20 is to take account of this decision.
- 4.5 The committee team are working on the new calendar for 2019/20 to fit in webcasting of Scrutiny Committees where possible. Having regard to the preparatory work required prior to a webcast meeting it is advised that holding two or more webcast meetings on one day should be avoided.
- 4.6 As can be seen from Wrexham's viewing figures (Appendix 1) during the 12 month period March 2018 – February 2019 the facility is being used. The data highlights the number of actual viewers (reach) who have watched a webcast. It should be noted that viewing by Council Officers is also captured in the data and it is not possible to

produce separate figures for officers'/public viewings. An increased level of viewers is likely to reflect greater public interest in the items of business transacted, similar to the varying levels of public attendance in the Council Chamber gallery, prior to the introduction of webcasting. Historically the items which have attracted the most viewers include scrutiny of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board by the Safeguarding, Communities & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, Budget Consultation and recommendations regarding the Revenue Budget by the Executive Board, Revenue Budget and Council Tax setting by the Council and site specific applications considered by the Planning Committee.

- 4.7 All six North Wales authorities use Public-i but to date there has been limited interest in procuring webcasting on a regional basis. Further enquiries are being made to consider whether this is a possibility.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 **Policy Framework** – The webcasting of Council meetings supports the vision in the Council Plan of being a strong and inclusive community leader and the Council's guiding principles in putting citizens at the centre of everything we do by facilitating greater access to Council meetings thereby supporting the Council's priority of Organisation in terms of public engagement.
- 5.2 **Budget** – Funding from the Council's cash limited budget has been limited to the provision of webcasting facilities for the current level of service for the period of the contract which was for three years plus one commencing 5 January 2016. Any increase in the current level of service/cost will require budget to be identified/compensating savings to be made.
- 5.3 **Legal** – Webcasting is not currently a legal requirement but the draft Local Government (Wales) Bill which was published for consultation on 24 November 2015 includes a requirement for proceedings of any meeting open to the public to be broadcast electronically. This provision is retained in the recently published White Paper Consultation – Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed.
- 5.4 **Staffing** – The adoption of the current system has resulted in a need to refocus the role of the Committee team who have responsibility for ensuring the proper working of the webcasting equipment in the Council Chamber. In addition there have been implications for staff in the Facilities Management team who are responsible for the room layout and microphones.
- 5.5 **Equality/Human Rights** – The webcasting of Council meetings improves access by members of the public to Council meetings by enabling them to follow proceedings without having to attend in person, although this will not assist those in poverty who do not have access to the necessary technology. An EIA has been carried out under reference CCS/EIA00157/2017.
- 5.6 **Risks** – There are no significant risks identified in this report. The expansion of webcasting to include Scrutiny Committees has put the Council in a better position to meet any statutory obligation to broadcast meetings which may be introduced in the future.

BACKGROUND PAPERS	LOCATION	WEBSITE INFO.
8 March 2018 – Report to Democratic Services Committee Item 8	Website	http://moderngov.wrexham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=141&MId=3751&Ver=4
5 July 2018 – Report to Democratic Services Committee Item 5	Website	http://moderngov.wrexham.gov.uk/documents/s12179/Item%205.pdf
6 September 2018 – Report to Democratic Services Committee Item 5	Website	http://moderngov.wrexham.gov.uk/documents/s12587/Item%205.pdf
26 September 2018 – Report to Council Item 9	Website	http://moderngov.wrexham.gov.uk/documents/s12668/Item%209.pdf

Webcast Statistics – Viewers – March 2018 to 28 February 2019

Webcast title	Live date	Viewers
Planning Committee	05/03/18	623
Executive Board	13/03/18	130
Planning Committee	16/03/18	60
Council	28/03/18	102
Planning Committee	03/04/18	86
Executive Board	10/04/18	232
Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee	19/04/18	24
Safeguarding, Communities & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee	30/04/18	65
Planning Committee	01/05/18	96
Executive Board	08/05/18	67
Council	23/05/18	526
Planning Committee	04/06/18	114
Employment, Business and Investment Scrutiny Committee	06/06/18	38
Executive Board	12/06/18	150
Planning Committee	02/07/18	126
Executive Board	10/07/18	147
Council	12/07/18	52
Planning Committee	13/07/18	90
Planning Committee	30/07/18	271
Executive Board	07/08/18	128
Planning Committee	10/08/18	166
Planning Committee	03/09/18	145
Executive Board	11/09/18	91
Council	26/09/18	83
Planning Committee	01/10/18	126
Executive Board	09/10/18	154
Executive Board	23/10/18	68
Council	24/10/18	54
Planning Committee	05/11/18	228
Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee	08/11/18	58
Executive Board	13/11/18	187
Planning Committee	16/11/18	62
Council	22/11/18	246
Planning Committee	03/12/18	95
Executive Board	11/12/18	59
Council	12/12/18	53
Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee	17/12/18	43
Planning Committee	07/01/19	239
Executive Board	08/01/19	131
Employment, Business and Investment Scrutiny Committee	09/01/19	19

Safeguarding, Communities and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee/ Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee	16/01/19	41
Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee	17/01/19	31
Planning Committee	18/01/19	42
Customers, Performance, Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee	23/01/19	34
Planning Committee	04/02/19	90
Employment, Business and Investment Scrutiny Committee	06/02/19	29
Executive Board	12/02/19	62
Homes and Environment Scrutiny Committee	13/02/19	30
Council	20/02/19	105
Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee	21/02/19	19
Customers, Performance, Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee	27/02/19	58